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15 July 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR: Dr. Henry A. Kissinger

SUBJECT: Organization on the Indochina Problem

1. I am the first to recognize that I have already discussed with you and with Alexis Johnson the problem of how the Government should organize to fight the political and military war in Indochina. Therefore, this memorandum may strike you as redundant or unrealistic in light of the complexities inherent in the "bureaucracy". Nevertheless, I risk your ire, because I genuinely believe that the issue involved is one of great importance. I am much persuaded that Hanoi regards the battle for Vietnam as a single struggle involving Laos and Cambodia as well. If one accepts this belief as valid, a corollary is that to combat the North Vietnamese effectively and efficiently, the United States should also view Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam as component elements of a single struggle and conduct its affairs accordingly.

2. When one looks today at how this Government conducts its affairs in the Indochina area, one comes across the following: A plethora of working level and policy level groups and committees, with much overlapping membership, are grappling with various component parts of the total Indochina problem but in a way that almost precludes effective, efficient address to the total problem. We have, for example, an NSC Vietnam ad hoc subcommittee which specifically avoids considering Laos or Cambodia, a Laos ad hoc committee which does not look at Vietnam (and whose activities have waned as those of WSAG have waxed), a Vietnam Special Studies Group which is different from both, and various subgroups of all three -- some of which work on overlapping problems (e.g., cease fire, where there has long been a subgroup working on cease fire under Mr. Sullivan's NSC Vietnam subcommittee and there is also a VSSG Working Group cease-fire panel, under a different chairman, with overlapping but different membership). One special ad hoc group drafts the response to NSSM-94, another drafts the response to NSSM-95, while the VSSG Working Group, in an organizationally separate exercise (but using some of the same people), drafts a different paper that materially

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bears on the conclusions of both. Meanwhile, the WSAO, or its working group, ploughs the same, or adjacent, terrain in separate fashion though, again, with some overlapping membership. This whole arrangement virtually guarantees duplicate efforts, confusion, wasted energy, missed opportunities, and poor staff work to support decision-making echelons of the government, including the President and yourself.

3. It would seem to me that a drastic rationalization and consolidation of this staff support and coordination effort would be of great benefit to the United States Government and those who determine its policies, particularly since the latter have every right to expect that the government's full resources will be efficiently marshalled to support and implement their decisions.

4. I am certainly no organization expert, but I recognize that when one is critical of a condition, one should not stop at carping. One should at least have a suggestion. I would, therefore, recommend that there be appointed within the NSC staff a single senior officer who would serve full-time as, in effect, your Indochina manager. This officer should relieve you of detailed concern on Indochina matters, and should have a small staff assisting him on a full-time basis. He should chair an interagency committee whose members from appropriate agencies should be of at least two- or three-star rank or at a civilian equivalent. This group would replace the present VSSO Working Group, the Vietnam ad hoc group, the Laos ad hoc group, and all similar bodies. Its members would have direct access to their respective principals and be empowered to vote their agency's stock on routine matters. It is not envisaged that this Indochina Committee would attempt on its own to do substantive analysis or detailed operational planning. Instead it should levy such tasks on the component of government most directly responsible, asking that component to prepare a draft with the participation and in consultation with other government components. The Chairman of the Indochina Committee would confine himself to setting terms of reference for commissioned projects, reviewing the drafts, directing revisions, assembling completed packages for policy review, and insuring that policy decisions are in fact carried out. The Committee would, of course, report to you and to whatever higher authorities you deemed appropriate or desirable.

(Signed) Richard Helms

Richard Helms
Director